

A & E

The bulk mail-handling post office building under construction in Jersey City, N.J., proposed in 1960 as an \$82-million job, and which officials now concede will cost at least \$130 million, has aroused congressional wrath. This time the subject is methane gas, which two congressmen charge is seeping through fill from a garbage-filled swamp 12 to 14 ft below the partially cast concrete foundation.

Rep. H.R. Gross (R-Iowa), ranking GOP member on the House post office facility subcommittee, charged in a recent floor speech that errors were made in site selection for the building. Rep. Robert N.C. Nix (D-Pa.), subcommittee chairman, has charged that methane seepage is a hazard and that the site is potentially dangerous. The Corps of Engineers, which is managing construction, has admitted that reports of gas seepage are true and that costly construction changes are required.

At a recent hearing, Brig. Gen. George Rebh, chief of the Corps' postal construction support office, said, "A prudent A-E in a given area, if he suspected there was gas, as in this case, would have to make a judgment as to whether or not a special ventilator system would have to be incorporated into the design."

Nix responded, "Then the assumption would be that the architect was either not prudent or not knowledgeable." Rebh replied, "I believe you could probably draw that conclusion."

Charles Knight, president of Lester B. Knight Associates, Inc., Chicago, project architect and manager of construction until this year (when the Corps was called on to manage construction of all postal facilities), declined comment on the congressional testimony except to say, "The methane gas problem was considered by us in depth and a decision was made to handle the problem at the site if the problem arose."

Thomas Rooney, Knight's vice president in charge of engineering, said, "Early in 1970 we designed a methane ventilation system which could have been installed just as economically after the building was constructed if methane proved to be a practical engineering problem."

Subcommittee member Rep. James M. Hanely (D-N.Y.) has raised the possibility of assessing damages to Knight for the additional cost of the methane ventilation system.

At week's end, Charles Schroer, a civilian engineer in charge of the project for the Corps, said that the decision to ventilate for gas seepage represents a change order. Schroer said that he is now negotiating a contract with a private contractor to furnish and install a ventilating system under the slab, but he wouldn't reveal the cost. Installation work has already begun.

According to Schroer, the decision to ventilate came when about 30% of the 24-acre slab was in place.

The ventilation system will consist of

corrugated metal pipe exhausts equipped with fans, 6-in.-dia perforated pipe conduits and stone-filled trenches to allow air beneath the slab to escape.

Woodward-Morehouse and Associates, Inc., Clifton, N.J., an affiliate of Woodward-Clyde Consultants, San Francisco soils engineer, was hired by the Post Office Department in 1969 to report on soil conditions at the Jersey City site. According to Gerald L. Baker, vice president, "We saw nothing at this site that would indicate that methane would be a problem."

EPA urges Corps to quit pollution studies

The Corps of Engineers plans to continue studies of regional waste water management systems despite a demand by William D. Ruckelshaus, administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), that the program be terminated.

Ruckelshaus argues in an Oct. 28 letter to the Secretary of the Army that the Corps' "pilot studies tend to superimpose long-range waste water alternatives . . . which run counter to the current thrust and financial capabilities of local planning." His principal objections appear to be directed at the Corps' contention that land disposal of waste water may be practical.

Kenneth BeLieu, Army under secretary, replied to Ruckelshaus on Nov. 2, saying his objections would be taken into consideration. Meanwhile, the Corps announced that it was going ahead with phase two of its study on five individual regional basins (ENR 4/22 p. 9). The nine-month studies will cost about \$4 million.

Bureaucratic spat. One EPA official indicated that the agency felt the Corps was trying too hard to get into the water pollution field. "It's push, push," he said. "The Corps wants to run us out of business."

Last week the bureaucratic battle spread to Capitol Hill, where the Corps picked up two vocal allies, Rep. Henry S. Reuss (D-Wis.) and Rep. Guy Vander Jagt (R-Mich.), who sent a scathing letter to Ruckelshaus, calling on him to rescind his recommendations. Reuss is chairman of the government operations subcommittee on conservation and natural resources, and Vander Jagt is the ranking Republican on the same committee.

They pointed out to Ruckelshaus that earlier this year, his agency and the Corps voluntarily entered into an agreement calling for the Corps to undertake the studies. During phase one of the work, a six-month effort, the Corps spent about \$1 million.

The efforts in both phase one and two for the Corps involve only five areas: Merrimack Basin and Boston; Chicago and northwest Indiana; Cleveland and Akron; Detroit and southeast Michigan; and the San Francisco, Sacramento and Stockton region of California.

Apparently in anticipation of EPA objections and to protect its flanks, the Corps has gone to Congress for specific basin-by-basin authority to undertake phase two of the studies. The legislation for all the basins has passed, except for the Merrimack Basin.

Why the reversal? Reuss and Vander Jagt say the Corps program has shown considerable promise and they question why EPA's position has undergone the abrupt reversal since the Corps initially undertook it with EPA's blessing.

The legislators also charged that states, localities, as well as EPA "have shown little imagination in the field of waste treatment management."

They went on to say: "Inefficiency and poor planning in metropolitan areas too often have been the rule . . . Integrated, regional treatment of wastes before they reach our waterways is largely unknown."

"The Corps' pilot studies program offers, for the first time, an opportunity to correct many of the past mistakes and to develop new, imaginative, efficient, and for the long term, economic waste treatment systems."